

## E-discussion Phase I: Strengthening Democratic Governance Engagements with the MDGs Achievement Process

Dear Colleagues,

I am very happy to be part of this e-discussion. Sorry for joining you at this final stage.

I very much agree with the conceptualization that poverty and injustice are the results of structures and processes of human made social, economic and political systems, and how decisions and choices are made by individuals, communities, institutions and nations.

I understand that governance refers to systems and institutions in a society that determine allocation, distribution and exercise of power, as well as the institutional mechanisms that determine resource sharing, interest mediations, negotiations and policy formulation. In this context, governance is a process of aggregation and articulation of public demand and subsequent conversion into deliverable policies and programmes which again inherently underpins accountability, transparency and responsiveness towards actions that affect the lives of poor people, and citizens at large. Without much reference to conceptual frameworks on the relationship between governance and poverty alleviation, we have evidences that countries like India, Vietnam, Uganda and others which run political and economic reforms have helped large number of their people to climb out of poverty.

The effectiveness of the fight against poverty and its root causes depends on the extent we understand and respond to the interdependence and interaction of national and global forces that impact on the policy choices. Power imbalances, i.e. access and control over material, human, intellectual and financial resources and the way they are used for by different individuals, groups and institutions lie at the heart of poverty and injustice. It is hard to think that poverty can be substantially reduced and the rights of poor people can be realized without changes in the structure and relationship of power. I believe this theoretical underpinning is the basis for UN and other development actors consider and adopt the human rights-based development approach in their normative framework.

A rights-based and people-centred approach to governance emphasizes the participation of citizens and the ability of poor and excluded people to ask questions, claim rights, make decisions and hold institutions accountable. These are the foundations for deepening democratic processes where people can shape the state and the state, in turn, creates the social, political, economic and legal conditions in which people can exercise their rights and be free from poverty at large. Mechanisms to ensure downward accountability, government/any entity to be accountable to the people or their constituency, is important to effectively enable the system perform the best interest of the people.

As many agree, democratic governments can act in favor of the poor and citizen at large, upholding social and economic rights and the principle of justice for poor and excluded people. It gives us hope that more nations than ever before are committed to the principles of representative democracy.

A **real participation** is central in the whole concept of governance. This is more than consulting or involving people to become involved in the process. Rather participation implies a radical rethinking of who undertakes processes, who makes choice and decision, and who learns and benefits from the process and outcome. Robert Chambers describes it as "... a process whereby local people are given the capacity and power to make their own analysis, direct the process, grow in confidence and their own decisions..." Participation is a key mechanism promoting good governance and the direct involvement of poor and excluded people and other stakeholders.

I strongly believe that as the space for the participation of grass root actors, CSOs, media and other stakeholders in the governance system increases, the chance of addressing poverty and meeting MDGs will be much better than any other alternatives.

Best Regards,

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